

Testimony
Submitted to the
Education Committee

March 7, 2011

H.B. NO. 6502 AN ACT CONCERNING THE OPEN CHOICE PROGRAM

Good afternoon Representative Fleischmann, Senator Stillman, and members of the Education Committee.

My name is Bruce Douglas, and I serve as the Executive Director of the Capitol Region Education Council (CREC), which represents the 35 school districts in the Capitol Region, the Hartford Area Superintendents' Association (HASA) and the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents (CAPSS).

I am testifying today in reference to House Bill 6502, An Act Concerning the Open Choice Program.

We are here to support the Open Choice funding allocated in H.B. No. 6502. We endorse the tiered funding formula based upon participation in the Open Choice program:

- \$3,000 per student for districts allocating less than 2% of their total enrollment to Open Choice students;
- \$4,000 per student for districts allocating less than 3%; and
- \$6,000 per student for districts allocating 3% or more.

Furthermore, we support the \$500,000 proposed funding for academic support services grants to participating school districts. This funding is essential for closing the achievement gap for Open Choice students who enter a suburban school district at the middle and secondary levels.

With the \$6,000 maximum funding level met, districts can commit to increasing their seat allocations in order to achieve the Open Choice participation benchmarks agreed upon by the State of Connecticut for the implementation of the Sheff Comprehensive Management Plan.

In order to meet the 2013 Sheff goal of 2,400 Open Choice seats it is necessary for all districts to increase the number of available seats to Open Choice students to greater than three percent of their total school system enrollment. You will see an attached document that details the anticipated future rates of participation in the Open Choice program by Connecticut districts.

Implementing enrollment management plans that illustrate a three-year seat declaration process could be a successful tool in providing school districts and the State

Department of Education with a planning and funding strategy to meet the prescribed Sheff benchmarks agreed upon in the Comprehensive Management Plan. The plans would be approved by Boards of Education and be delineated in school and district improvement plans as a strategy for closing local achievement gaps.

Furthermore, we support the expansion of the Open Choice program to include preschool-aged children. Students are more likely to remain in Open Choice placements and experience academic and social success in inclusive settings if they are admitted at the kindergarten level. Expanding the Open Choice program to preschool will ensure continuity of an educational program for students who need access to early intervention services and will reduce the need for academic and support services for students who would otherwise enter the district later in their developmental career.

All of us who serve our state and communities believe in equal access to high quality schooling for all of Connecticut's children and are committed to a time when the demand for access to integrated settings can be met in full. The development of enrollment management plans will ensure that our state and communities have a clear strategy for planning and decision making that will lead to a high quality, integrated education for our children. Expanding the Open Choice program to preschool will guarantee that our children have the earliest access to high quality educational programs and thereby the greatest likelihood of sustained success.

I thank you for your enduring support and kind consideration.

Open Choice Enrollment as of 1/15/2011 &
Increase Needed to Reach 3% Enrollment per District

	2010-11 District Enrollment	2010-11 Open Choice Seats	2010-11 % Participation	# Seats at 3% Participation Level	Increase Needed per District to Reach 3%	Graduates	2011-12 Starting Point
Sheff Region Towns							
Avon	3,551	74	2.1%	107	33	(2)	72
Canton	1,753	53	3.0%	53	(0)	(3)	50
East Granby	891	33	3.7%	33	0	0	33
East Windsor	1,329	44	3.3%	44	0	(3)	41
Ellington	2,725	49	1.8%	82	33	0	49
Farmington	4,126	78	1.9%	124	46	(4)	74
Glastonbury	6,809	51	0.7%	204	153	(1)	50
Granby	2,240	75	3.3%	75	0	(7)	68
Newington	4,425	49	1.1%	133	84	(6)	43
Rocky Hill	2,580	23	0.9%	77	54	0	23
Simsbury	4,758	104	2.2%	143	39	(8)	96
South Windsor	4,556	79	1.7%	137	58	(6)	73
Suffield	2,509	47	1.9%	75	28	(3)	44
Vernon	3,597	21	0.6%	108	87	(4)	17
West Hartford	10,221	112	1.1%	307	195	(2)	110
Wethersfield	3,796	33	0.9%	114	81	(1)	32
Windsor	3,625	6	0.2%	phasing out		(1)	5
Windsor Locks	1,785	41	2.3%	54	13	0	41
Non-Sheff Region Towns							
Berlin	3,118	49	1.6%	94	45	(1)	48
Bolton	899	29	3.2%	29	0	(2)	27
Bristol	8,561	6	0.1%	257	251	(2)	4
Cromwell	2,022	71	3.5%	69	(2)	(4)	67
Enfield	5,887	60	1.0%	177	117	(2)	58
Plainville	2,460	47	1.9%	74	27	(3)	44
Portland	1,404	13	0.9%	42	29	0	13
Reg. School District 10	2,754	5	0.2%	83	78	0	5
Somers	1,630	18	1.1%	49	31	(1)	17
Southington	6,795	23	0.3%	204	181	(3)	20
		1,293		2,944	1,657	(69)	1,224